

Delaware Wins Federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge

Award Supports State's Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Education and will Fund More Progress

Markell: "We must invest in our future and our most important asset, our state's children."

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Wilmington – Delaware's collaborative efforts to improve access to and the quality of early childhood education and the strength of the state's proposal to move each forward were acknowledged today when Delaware was named a winner in the federal Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. The First State was also a winner in the initial Race to the Top contest, which challenged states to make public schools stronger.



"The research is clear that investing in early childhood education pays economic dividends. The fact is, we cannot sit still in the face of economic competition. We must not be complacent. We must invest in our future, and we are. Our plan matches additional support with greater accountability, to ensure more students show up the first day of kindergarten ready and able to learn," **Governor Jack Markell** said.

By building on Delaware's ongoing work and investments, the federal funding will help better ensure:

- That the individuals caring for our children have the support, training and expertise needed to prepare children for entry into kindergarten;

- That the early care providers have the infrastructure and tools to maximize learning
- That kindergarten teachers have the information they need to help them work with their students, and
- That the necessary data is available to ensure improvements.

Last year, the Governor committed and the legislature approved an additional \$22 million to help build stronger staff and encourage stronger services at early childhood education centers. That effort includes the expansion of the Delaware Stars for Early Success quality-rating program, which provides technical and financial assistance to enable early care and education providers to achieve higher standards. The federal competition acknowledged that Delaware was well underway with changes before the competition was even announced.

“When we made our proposal in the spring, we were not aware of this upcoming Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. When we learned of it, it became very clear that our commitment and investments in early childhood education created the unique opportunity to partner with federal government and our early childhood education providers,” Markell said. “We are incredibly excited to be among the winning states for President Obama’s Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. We are excited because this grant will enable us to significantly enhance and accelerate our early education plan. We thank President Obama, Secretary Sebelius, and Secretary Duncan for the opportunity and for recognizing the importance of investing in early education. We congratulate them on this unique competition that incents innovation, information sharing, and collaboration. And of course, we thank them for the grant,” Markell said.

The Governor thanked **Lt. Governor Matt Denn** for helping to drive the effort and for his advocacy and involvement in these issues.

“The promise we make to children that if you work hard and stay focused you can be anything you want to be when you grow up is a promise more easily fulfilled by children who have access to quality early childhood education,” Denn said. “This will make a difference, for the kids who are going to learn and those that are providing them quality care.”

Delaware’s application and plan are focused on:

- The expansion and Redesign of the Delaware Stars for Early Success (STARS) quality rating program, which is well underway.
- Building a professional, effective workforce of high-quality educators
- Supporting the health and development needs of the whole child – this includes mental health services and our “Parents as Teachers” program
- Improving data to improve Kindergarten readiness and more efficiently target resources

The state’s submission was a collaborative effort from the Governor and Lt. Governor’s Office, the Departments of Education (DDOE), Health and Social Services (DHSS) and Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF), along with community organizations and service providers including the Rodel Foundation, the Early Childhood Council, and the STARS program. The Delaware State Education Association and offered its advice and support, including the direct input of several kindergarten teachers. Members of the Governor’s Cabinet made clear that the federal support will help.

“Preparing for this grant was a wonderful opportunity to examine the strengths and weaknesses in Delaware’s early childhood education system and to plan for ways to excel where we are strong,” said **Department of Health and Social Services Secretary Rita Landgraf**. “Learning what needs to be developed in our overall system enables us to better plan and

collaborate across agencies so that our entire system is strong. This grant will ensure that Delaware's early learning system, which is already good, can become world class."

"Providing children with a solid foundation from which they can learn and grow is paramount to their success," said **Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families Secretary Vivian Rapposelli**. "This Early Learning Challenge grant will help ensure Delaware's youth are given then best chance at a good start to their education and will further enhance efforts already underway by the State, our community partners and the early education program providers."

"This award will help us build on the work already underway through our state's first Race to the Top grant, including aligning data with our K-12 system to improve kindergarten readiness," said **Secretary of Education Dr. Lillian M. Lowery**. "We aim to establish a world-class early childhood data system that ultimately will link information about children from their earliest years to post-secondary schools. This information will help the state to target its resources to the most effective programs to lead to the best outcomes for our children."

"The first five years of life are critical to each child's future success. This grant targets those first years to help more students be better prepared to get off to a great start. It is important for us to invest in well-rounded early childhood programs, including the social-emotional development so important to young children. Our pre-K and kindergarten teachers across Delaware have the knowledge and experience to help plan and carry out initiatives best-suited to our students," said **Frederika Jenner, President of the Delaware State Education Association**.

The federal delegation offered its support to help launch the program nationally and support early childhood education. While they were unable to attend today's announcement at an

early childhood center because they were working in Washington, each offered their endorsement of the program and its outcome.

Senator Tom Carper said: "I was proud to work closely with Gov. Markell, Sen. Coons, Rep. Carney, and Delaware Secretary of Education Lowery to ensure that Delaware had a strong application for this federal funding and I'm thrilled that our hard work has paid off. This grant is another important tool to help improve Delaware's early-childhood educational programs through the innovative and ambitious reforms supported by Race to the Top. This funding will help Delaware's educators employ assessments that better measure the First State's youngest students' knowledge and skills, including children enrolled in child care, Head Start centers and public or private preschools. I am delighted that Delaware is one of the states honored with this significant Race to the Top grant, it is a testament to the First State's strong commitment to improving education for our children of all ages."

Senator Chris Coons said: "Too frequently, children enter elementary school already lagging behind those who have attended quality early-learning programs that teach development skills. We need to do everything we can to give our kids the best start possible, which is why I was an original cosponsor of legislation in March to create precisely this type of program. The Early Learning Challenge will improve the quality of our early-learning education and increase the number of children eligible to receive it. Under the leadership of Governor Markell and Secretary Lowery, Delaware has worked tirelessly to improve the quality of the education our kids receive, and the Early Learning Challenge grant is a testament to that. I heartily congratulate all of Delaware's educators on this win."

Congressman John Carney said: "I am pleased that Delaware has once again distinguished itself as a nationwide leader in

education and I look forward to seeing the positive results that I am certain will follow from winning the Early Learning Challenge Competition. This grant will help fortify efforts already underway to improve early childhood education across the state, with the goal of ensuring that every child enters kindergarten ready to learn. As a result of this achievement, and after years of statewide collaboration, Delaware is now poised to break new ground in our effort to provide a world-class education to every child in our state.”

Delaware’s application for the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge can be found [here](#).

A presentation that outlines Delaware’s application and early education plan can be found [here](#).